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The CDF Silicon Vertex Trigger ☆

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Abstract

The Collider Detector at Fermilab (CDF) experiment's Silicon Vertex Trigger (SVT) is a system of 150 custom 9U VME boards that reconstructs axial tracks in the CDF silicon strip detector in a 15 μs pipeline. SVT's 35 μm impact parameter resolution enables CDF's Level 2 trigger to distinguish primary and secondary particles, and hence to collect large samples of hadronic bottom and charm decays. We review some of SVT's key design features. Speed is achieved with custom VLSI pattern recognition, linearized track fitting, pipelining, and parallel processing. Testing and reliability are aided by built-in logic state analysis and test-data sourcing at each board's input and output, a common interboard data link, and a universal "Merger" board for data fan-in/fan-out. Speed and adaptability are enhanced by use of modern FPGAs.

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1. CDF trigger overview

The recently upgraded Collider Detector at Fermilab (CDF) experiment [1] pursues a broad physics program at Fermilab's Tevatron proton-antiproton collider, comprising topics as diverse as top quark production and charmed meson decay. In the present Tevatron data-taking period ("Run 2"), the c.m. energy is $\sqrt{s} = 1.96$ TeV, the bunch-crossing interval is 396 ns (with a possible upgrade to 132 ns for high luminosity), and peak luminosities are $0.5 \times 10^{32}\ \mathrm{cm}^{-2}\ \mathrm{s}^{-1}$ to date and climbing towards a goal of $2 \times 10^{32}\ \mathrm{cm}^{-2}\ \mathrm{s}^{-1}$. CDF's new drift chamber [2] and silicon detector [3] are discussed in detail elsewhere in these proceedings.

One challenge for a hadron collider experiment is to extract signals of interest efficiently from much larger backgrounds. To illustrate the orders of magnitude, the total inelastic cross-section at the Tevatron is about 50 mb, while the b-quark cross-section within CDFs acceptance (transverse momentum $p_T > 6$ GeV, rapidity $|y| < 1$) is about 10 μb, and the t-quark cross-section is about 5 pb. At luminosities above $0.35 \times 10^{32}\ \mathrm{cm}^{-2}\ \mathrm{s}^{-1}$, the mean number of interactions per beam crossing exceeds 1. Reducing the 1.7 MHz beam-crossing rate to CDF's 70 Hz DAQ output rate implies a trigger rejection of 25 000.

Good background rejection in the trigger requires fast identification of distinctive signal signatures. In the CDF trigger, many important signatures exploit fast charged-particle track reconstruction in the bending plane of the spectrometer, transverse to the beam axis. The trigger matches drift chamber tracks with EM calorimeter showers, muon-chamber stubs, and silicon detector data, respectively, to identify electrons, muons, and b and c daughters.

CDF uses a three-level trigger. On each beam crossing (396 or 132 ns), the entire front end digitizes (silicon samples and holds). A 5.5 μs pipeline of programmable logic forms axial drift chamber tracks and can match these with calorimeter and muon-chamber data. On Level 1 accept, front-end boards store the event to one of four buffers (silicon digitizes and transmits to the silicon trigger and event builder). Level 2 processing, with about 30 μs latency, adds fast silicon tracking, calorimeter clustering, and EM calorimeter shower-max data. The final Level 2 decision is made in software on a single-board computer, so a wider range of thresholds and derived quantities is possible (e.g. transverse mass of muon track pairs), even for information that is in principle available at Level 1. On Level 2 accept, front-end VME crates transmit to the event builder. At Level 3, a farm of 250 commodity PCs runs full event reconstruction. This is the first stage at which three-dimensional tracks (e.g. for invariant mass calculation) are available. Events passing Level 3 are written to disk.

While some optimization remains to be done, the maximum output at L1/L2/L3 is approximately 35000/350/70 Hz. Each of these rates is an order of magnitude higher than in CDFs 1992–96 running period. In addition, drift chamber tracking has moved from L2 to L1, and silicon tracking has moved from offline to L2. These three changes allow CDF to collect large samples of fully hadronic bottom and charm decays, by requiring two drift chamber tracks at L1, requiring each track to have a significant (at least 120 μm) impact parameter at L2, and performing full software tracking at L3 to confirm the hardware tracking. The samples made possible by CDF's front-end, trigger, and DAQ upgrades have yielded novel physics results [4] at an early stage of Run 2.

CDF's Level 1 drift chamber hardware track processor, XFT [5], is a cornerstone of the CDF trigger. For every bunch crossing, with 1.9 μs latency, it finds tracks of $p_T > 1.5$ GeV with 96% efficiency. XFT obtains coarse hit data (two time bins) from each axial drift chamber wire, finds line segments in the 12 measurement layers of each axial superlayer, then links segments from these four superlayers to form track candidates. XFT's resolutions, $\sigma(1/p_T) = 1.7\%/\mathrm{GeV}$ and $\sigma(\phi_0) = 5$ mrad, are only about a factor of 10 coarser than those of the offline reconstruction.

2. SVT track processing

For each event passing Level 1, the Silicon Vertex Trigger (SVT) [6–8] swims each XFT track into the silicon detector, associates silicon hit data from four detector planes, and produces a transverse impact parameter measurement of 35 μm resolution (50 μm when convoluted with the beam spot) with a mean latency of 24 μs, 9 μs of which are spent waiting for the first silicon data. SVT's impact parameter resolution for $p_T \approx 2$ GeV is comparable to that of offline tracks that do not use Layer 00 (mounted on the beam pipe), which is not yet available in SVT.

For fiducial offline muon tracks from J/ψ decay, having $p_T > 1.5$ GeV and hits in the four silicon planes used by SVT, measured SVT efficiency is 85%. The most suitable definition of efficiency in a given context depends on what one aims to optimize: restricting the denominator to $p_T > 2$ GeV increases the efficiency to 90%, while relaxing the requirements on which layers contain offline silicon hits reduces the efficiency to 70%, and looser fiducial requirements reduce the efficiency further; the ultimate denominator for SVT would be all XFT-matched offline silicon tracks that are useful for physics analysis.

SVT is a system of 150 custom 9U VME boards containing FPGAs, RAMs, FIFOs, and one ASIC design. CPUs are used only for initialization and monitoring. SVT's input comprises 144 optical fibers, 1 Gbit/s each, and one 0.2 Mbit/s LVDS cable; its output is one 0.7 Mbit/s LVDS cable.

Three key features allow SVT to carry out in 15 μs a silicon track reconstruction that typically requires $\mathcal{O}(0.1\ \mathrm{s})$ in software: a highly parallel/pipelined architecture, custom VLSI pattern recognition, and a linear track fit in fast FPGAs.

The silicon detector's modular, symmetric geometry lends itself to parallel processing. SVT's first stage, converting a sparsified list of channel numbers and pulse heights into charge-weighted hit centroids, processes $12 \times 6 \times 5$ (azimuthal $\times$ longitudinal $\times$ radial) silicon planes in 360 identical FPGAs. The overall structure of SVT reflects the detector's 12-fold azimuthal symmetry. Each 30° azimuthal slice is processed in its own asynchronous, data-driven pipeline that first computes hit centroids, then finds coincidences to form track candidates, then fits the silicon hits and drift chamber track for each candidate to extract circle parameters and a goodness of fit.

In SVT's usual configuration, a track candidate requires a coincidence of an XFT track and hits in a specified four (out of five available) silicon layers. To define a coincidence, each detector plane is divided into bins of programmable width, typically 250–700 μm, and XFT tracks are swum to the outer radius of the silicon detector and binned with 3 mm typical width. For each 30° slice, the set of 32 K most probable coincidences ("patterns") is computed offline in a Monte Carlo program and loaded into 256 custom VLSI associative memory (AM) chips. For every event, each binned hit is presented in parallel to the 256 AM chips, and the hit mask for each of the 128 patterns per chip is accumulated in parallel. When the last hit has been read, a priority encoder enumerates the patterns for which all five layers have a matching hit. The processing time is thus linear in the total number of hits in each slice and linear in the number of *matched* patterns.

There is no exact linear relationship between the transverse parameters c, ϕ, d of a track in a solenoidal field and the coordinates at which the track meets a set of flat detector planes: the coordinates are more closely linear in $c/\cos^3\phi$, $\tan\phi$, and $d/\cos\phi$. But for $p_T > 2$ GeV, $|d| < 1$ mm, $|\phi| < 15°$, a linear fit biases d by at most a few percent. By linear regression to Monte Carlo data, we derive the 3×6 coefficients $\mathbf{V}$ and 3 intercepts $\vec{p}_0$ relating $\vec{p} = (c, \phi, d)$ to the vector $\vec{x}$ of c_{XFT}, ϕ_{XFT}, and four silicon hits: $\vec{p} = \vec{p}_0 + \mathbf{V} \cdot \vec{x}$. The same regression produces coefficients $\mathbf{C}$ and intercepts $\vec{\chi}_0$, corresponding to the fit's 3 degrees of freedom, with which we calculate constraints $\vec{\chi} = \vec{\chi}_0 + \mathbf{C} \cdot \vec{x}$ and the usual $\chi^2 = |\vec{\chi}|^2$. In the start-of-run download, we precompute $\vec{p}$ and $\vec{\chi}$ for the coordinates at the edge of each pattern and store them in flash memory. Using each candidate's pattern ID as a hint, the fitter board computes corrections to $\vec{p}$ and $\vec{\chi}$ with respect to the pattern edge, using 8-bit multiplication in 6 parallel FPGAs, in 250 ns per fitted track. Tracks passing programmable goodness-of-fit cuts propagate downstream.

3. SVT diagnostic features

An SVT whose processing time, resolution, or inefficiency were 20–30% larger would still have enabled novel physics results at CDF. But an SVT that could not be commissioned quickly or operated reliably would have been a failure. Several design features of SVT contributed to its rapid commissioning and reliable operation.

The essence of SVT's component-based architecture is captured by the SVT cable and the SVT Merger board. Nearly all SVT internal data—hit centroids, drift chamber tracks, pattern IDs, track candidates, and fitted SVT tracks—travel as LVDS signals on common 26-conductor-pair cables carrying data bits, a data strobe, a flow-control signal, and a ground pair. The data are variable-length packets of 21-bit words, plus end-packet and end-event bits. Data fan-in and fan-out are performed inside FPGAs, not on backplanes, by a universal Merger board that concatenates event data for up to four SVT cable inputs and provides two SVT cable outputs. Every fan-in stage compares event IDs for its sources and can drive a backplane error line on mismatch. A parity bit for each cable-event provides a basic check of data integrity. It is illustrative of SVT's design strategy that the SVT cable and Merger board were prototyped and tested *before* the boards to cluster hits, find and fit tracks, etc.

The Merger board is reminiscent of the fan-in/fan-out modules found in NIM trigger electronics, and lends itself to the same kind of inventive ad-hoc cabling for producing quick results in test stands and during system commissioning.

On each end of every SVT cable is a circular memory buffer that records—as a logic state analyzer—the last 10^5 words sent or received on that cable. Comparing a sender's output buffer with a receiver's input buffer checks data transmission. Comparing a board's input and output with emulation software checks data processing. The memories also serve as sources and sinks of test patterns for testing single boards, a small chain of boards, a slice of SVT, SVT as a standalone system, or the data paths to SVT's external sources and sink. The buffers can be frozen and read by monitoring software parasitically during data taking, and all of SVT's buffers can be frozen together, via backplane signals, when any board detects an error condition, such as invalid data.

By polling SVT's circular memories during beam running, large samples of track and hit data, pattern IDs, etc.—unbiased by L2 or L3 trigger decisions—are sampled and statistically analyzed to monitor data quality. A beam-finding program monitors 10^7 tracks per hour, fitting and reporting to the accelerator control network an updated Tevatron beamline fit every 30 s. The beam fit is also written to the DAQ event record and used to correct in situ every SVT track's impact parameter for the sinusoidal bias vs. ϕ resulting from the beamline's offset from the detector origin, so that the trigger is immune to modest beam offsets.

The flexibility of FPGAs has been exploited throughout SVT, enabling SVT to adapt to unforseen circumstances when commissioning the detector and trigger as a whole. Later boards had the benefit of more flexible programmable chips. In particular, the board that subtracts the beam offset track-by-track—the last SVT board to be built—illustrates well both the utility of modern FPGAs and the virtue of a component-based architecture. It was designed as a clean-up board, beyond the SVT baseline, to ensure that at most one SVT track is output per XFT track. SVT's modularity allowed this final processing stage to be added seamlessly. Progress in FPGA technology allowed the board to consist essentially of input circuitry + large FPGA + output circuitry. With this design, it was straightforward to adapt the board to subtract a sinusoidal beam offset—which proved more convenient than the baseline plan to steer the Tevatron beam. This clean-up board has found even further uses, such as recording SVT's event-by-event processing time into the DAQ event record and online monitor.

In conclusion, the Silicon Vertex Trigger has been commissioned and operated successfully for CDF's first year of Run 2 physics data. Among the key reasons for this system's success are its modular architecture and its ability to sink and source test data at a wide range of pipeline stages, both in tests and during beam runs. SVT's flexibility and diagnostic features were particularly valuable during the CDF commissioning period.

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